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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002120

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: MEK IN CAMP ASHRAF: DISPELLING MEK CLAIMS OF INNOCENCE

REF: BAGHDAD 2093 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: DCM Robert Ford for reasons 1.4(b)&(d).

¶1. (C) Summary. U.S. military medical personnel will enter Ashraf, Diyala Province, in the next 24 hours to determine the extent of the hunger strike (reftel). While the residents of Ashraf have refused food shipments from the GOI, the residents' claims of GOI blockage of food shipments to Ashraf appear to be false. The Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK), a Marxist-Islamic terrorist organization, is headquartered in Ashraf, having arrived in Iraq in 1986. The group was founded in the 1960's and initially supported the Iranian revolution, actively participating in the takeover of U.S. Embassy Tehran. Although welcomed and actively supported by the Saddam Hussein regime, the current GOI considers the MEK a terrorist organization and has plans to relocate the 3400 residents of Ashraf to a place further from the Iranian border than their current location in Ashraf. Some high ranking GOI officials (Iraqi Minister of State for National Security Shirwan al-Waeli) recently started voicing a preference to see the MEK relocated to a third country. The MEK very adeptly sway public opinion by engaging in propaganda exercises intended to garner sympathy from an unsuspecting public (i.e. self-immolation, hunger strikes, and demonstrations). End Summary.

THE LATEST

¶2. (C) The MEK residents of Ashraf and the MEK detainees currently being held by the GOI, claim to be on a hunger strike. The numbers of individuals in Ashraf currently on a hunger strike has not been determined. A U.S. medical assessment team will enter Ashraf in the next 24 hours to gather further information. The MEK have agreed to this step. (Note: Ashraf residents are in the process of building guard posts on Lions Gate. EmbOff is unsure how a coordinated hunger strike is affecting the construction process. End Note.) It appears the MEK are using this hunger strike to extract concessions from the GOI, such as inducing them to reconsider their plan to relocate the MEK as a result of overwhelming international pressure.

HISTORY OF THE MEK

¶3. (C) The MEK is a Marxist-Islamic terrorist organization, originally founded in the 1960's in opposition to Shah Mohamad Reza Pahlavi. This organization targeted Americans living in Iran in the 1970's, assassinating three U.S. military personnel and three contractors. At that time, the MEK supported the takeover of U.S. Embassy Tehran, but ultimately split with the Ayatollah Khomeini, after he refused to allow them to share power in the new regime.

A SADDAM TOOL

¶4. (C) During the Iran/Iraq War, Saddam Hussein invited the MEK to establish their headquarters in Iraq in 1986. While in Iraq, Saddam Hussein provided the MEK extensive military training and financial support until 2003. It is alleged the MEK assisted the Iraqi Republican Guard in suppressing the Kurdish and Shiite uprisings in Iraq after the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Since 1997, the MEK has been listed by the United States as a foreign terrorist organization because of its attacks against Iranian diplomatic missions worldwide and especially because of its assassination of the three U.S. Army officers and three U.S. civilian contractors in Tehran in the 1970's.

RIGID DISCIPLINE

¶5. (C) Husband and wife team, Maryam and Masud Rajavi, are Q5. (C) Husband and wife team, Maryam and Masud Rajavi, are the leaders of the MEK. Maryam currently resides in Paris, acting as the public face of the MEK's political arm, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI). The whereabouts of Masud are unknown, although he continues to serve as the operational leader for the MEK. (Note: There are unconfirmed rumors that Masud is deceased. End Note.) The MEK is a largely female-driven organization that claims to promote equal rights for all its members. However, even though Maryam and Masud remain married, the members of the

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MEK are denied this basic right. The MEK leadership requires its members to divorce and forbid members from engaging in normal male-female relationships of any kind. Members are also forbidden from establishing close personal relationships. The MEK represses its members through cult-like practices, such as keeping control of their passports, preventing free movement, and rationing the information that is provided to members.

WITH A GREAT PR MACHINE

¶6. (C) In the past, MEK members have used self-immolation to draw attention to their cause. The NCRI has a very capable public relations machine, frequently employing tools such as hunger strikes and demonstrations to pressure and solicit sympathy from the international community. The MEK have a broad network of lawyers, parliamentarians, activists and former foreign government officials the NCRI can count on as vocal supporters to advance their agenda in world capitals. As part of a calculated public relations and lobbying effort, the NCRI has succeeded in convincing some former detractors that the movement, despite its bloody history, is nothing more than victimized political activists seeking freedom and equality in Iran.
HILL